

News Release

Preliminary Designs Completed for Nature-Based Play Spaces in Crookston and Warren, Minn.

By asvec on Friday, July 29, 2011

Preliminary design concepts for nature-based play spaces for the cities of Crookston and Warren, Minn. have now been completed, and community feedback is needed. The children's play space for Crookston is being designed for Castle Park, which is located off Castle Street to the west of the Crookston hospital complex. The play space for Warren is being designed for Island Park located off Warren's South Division Street.

Two preliminary designs were prepared for each community. All four designs were a collaborative effort between the University of Minnesota Crookston and Twin Cities campuses. The Warren designs are being displayed at the Marshall County Fair from July 27-31 while the Crookston designs will be displayed on Tuesday, August 2 at National Night Out held in Crookston's Central Park.

The nature-based play space preliminary design concepts were created by Kristen Murray, U of M, Twin Cities landscape architecture graduate student, and Kristine Neu, U of M Crookston environmental landscaping undergraduate. Both students were advised by Eric Castle, landscape architect and U of M Crookston assistant professor of horticulture.

A nature-based play space is not the average playground. It looks more like woods, prairie, or garden. Unlike the open woods, the designs have a border, so that parents know where their children are, and children can play freely in the space. The designs incorporate plants and materials native to the area, with the intention of highlighting local stories and the talents and skills of people who live in the area.

Nature-based play puts kids in touch with nature by encouraging them to play with rocks, water, sand, leaves, sticks and other materials found outdoors. Nature-based play includes everything from active play (climbing, jumping, running) and creative play (make-believe, building, art-making). Usually this play is unstructured: kids can choose what they want to do, unlike in a structured group activity or class. Research is demonstrating that this is necessary for healthy child development.

The design process for both Castle and Island Park has been ongoing since early summer. In June there was a gathering of community members in each city to share ideas about how to transform a portion of their community's park into a nature-based play space. Further input was gathered from small group interactions with parents and children. The ideas gathered, along with countless hours of research, turned into the two preliminary designs for each community. The June brainstorming sessions were part of a larger process to develop plans, create, and install the play spaces.

Displaying the preliminary designs at the Marshall County Fair and National Night Out is part of the process of gathering community feedback about the designs. In the coming weeks the project team will be using community feedback to draft final designs for each site to be revealed in the end of August. Installation of the nature-based play spaces will begin this fall and carry over into next spring. The projects will likely be completed in phases.



Members of the Children Discovering Nature in Northwest Minnesota project team at the Marshall County Fair in Warren, Minn. with two preliminary design concepts for a nature-based play space for the city of Warren. A similar presentation of designs for Castle Park in Crookston, Minn. will be made Tuesday, August 2 at National Night Out. Pictured are (L to R) Daniel Handeen, U of M, Twin Cities Center for Sustainable Building Research; Kristen Murray, U of M, Twin Cities landscape architecture graduate student; Frances Tougas, North Valley Public Health SHIP coordinator; Kristine Neu, U of M, Crookston environmental landscaping undergraduate; and Eric Castle, landscape architect and U of M Crookston Assistant Professor of Horticulture

In addition to creating new play spaces for children, the project is investigating how the process of designing these spaces can influence public health. Assistant Professor Eric Castle remarked, "a main objective of this project is to stimulate people to start thinking about children's health as well as their own health, and getting people outdoors is a great way to do that."

The nature-based play spaces in Crookston and Warren are two of several regional installations under the Children Discovering Nature in Northwest Minnesota Project, which is providing design and financial support for nature based-play spaces in six area communities. The project team also includes Daniel Handeen and Virajita Singh, both research fellows at the U of M, Twin Cities Center for Sustainable Building Research (CSBR), and Linda Kingery, executive director of the Northwest Minnesota Sustainable Development Partnership (NWRSDP). Kirsten Fagerlund, interim Statewide Health Improvement (SHIP) coordinator on behalf of Sarah Reese, SHIP coordinator, is serving as the liaison between the community of Crookston and the project team. Frances Tougas, North Valley Public Health Statewide Health Improvement (SHIP) coordinator, is serving a similar role in Warren.

The team is working with city officials who will be instrumental in the approval of the design and installation of the space. In Warren, the team is also working with the Jaycees as the group will be providing a portion of the financial resources and volunteers to make the installation of their community's play space a reality. A portion of the financial support for the planning and implementation of both play spaces is being provided by a grant received from the Otto Bremer Foundation.

The project team is interested in forming a core advisory committee for the nature-based play space in each community. This committee would be comprised of a group of volunteers who will help make decisions, organize other volunteer efforts, and generally help create a vision for the play space into the future. If interested in being a part of the advisory committee in Crookston, community members are encouraged to contact Kirsten Fagerlund 218-281-3385 kfagerlund@pcphealth.org for more information. Community members of Warren should contact Frances Tougas 218-745-5154 ftougas@nvhc.net.



Concepts for Castle Park in Crookston (above)



Concepts for Island Park in Warren (below)



All community members and their children are encouraged to give feedback about the preliminary design concepts for Castle and Island Park . A short online feedback form is available on the U of M Crookston website, simply click on "Share Your Feedback" to give your much appreciated input.

Today the University of Minnesota Crookston delivers 29 bachelor's degree programs, 18 minors, and more than 40 concentrations, including several online degrees, in the areas of agriculture and natural resources; business; liberal arts and education; and math, science and technology. With an enrollment of about 1,400 undergraduates from more than 25 countries and 40 states, the Crookston campus offers a supportive, close-knit atmosphere that leads to a prestigious University of Minnesota degree. "Small Campus. Big Degree." To learn more, visit www.umcrookston.edu.

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